

Michigan
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Articles in Today's Clips

Wednesday, May 7, 2008

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May 7, 2008

Police: Death of infant is a homicide

Midday update

Christine Rook
Lansing State Journal

Lansing police are investigating the death of a 13-month-old girl this morning as a homicide.

The infant died at a local hospital this morning. She had been listed in critical condition since Tuesday, according to the Lansing Police Department.

A 21-year-old care giver is in custody. Lansing Police Department detectives reported they plan to seek child abuse charges.

The girl was hospitalized after a man called 9-1-1 Tuesday about 1:30 p.m., stating the baby had fallen and was not breathing, according to Lansing police. The incident occurred in a home in the 700 block of Quaker Court.

Check www.lsj.com for updates.

Article published at MonroeNews.com on May 6, 2008

Dad sentenced in drunken driving case

The Hamtramck man whose daughter called for help because he was driving drunkenly through Monroe County was sentenced to fines and costs Monday.

First District Judge Jack Vitale ordered Pawel P. Bozek, 39, to pay \$1,260 in fines and costs. He also will be on probation for six months.

On Feb. 11, Mr. Bozek was pulled over by Monroe Police after his 13-year-old daughter called 911 to ask for help because her father was driving drunk as they headed south on I-75. He was arrested.

Last month Mr. Bozek pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor drunken driving charge and in exchange a child endangerment charge was dropped.

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Toddler seriously injured while driving ATV

BY SHERI McWHIRTER

smcwhirter@record-eagle.com

Wed, May 07 2008

EAST JORDAN -- Investigators hope to determine how a 2-year-old toddler clamored aboard an ATV, started the ignition, drove himself over a five-foot embankment and suffered serious injuries.

Officials also will decide if it's a criminal neglect case.

Sutton Andrew Majeske of Port Huron was operating a child-sized Suzuki four-wheeler on Sunday morning at a residence on Behling Road in Charlevoix County's Wilson Township when he went over a cellar embankment, lost control and crashed. The child sustained a severely broken jaw and cuts to his face, authorities said.

Sutton was rushed to Charlevoix Area Hospital and later air-lifted in critical condition to Hurley Medical Center in Flint. He improved to fair condition by Tuesday, hospital officials said.

The accident apparently happened without parental supervision or knowledge, officials said.

"The father was in the garage. The mother was in the house," said Charlevoix County Undersheriff Don Schneider. "The victim had been riding earlier with an older brother, about 11 or 12 years old. The father didn't even hear him start the machine up."

The ATV is designed for a child between 6 and 12 years. The toddler started it, drove across the yard and over an embankment, Schneider said.

Majeske was wearing a helmet while driving the machine, which is owned by his father, John Majeske, of Port Huron. The mother's name was not immediately available, Schneider said.

"It's questionable whether we've got a criminal or neglect case, with the father and mother unaware of him being on the machine," he said.

The case will be reviewed by the Charlevoix County Prosecutor's Office for a decision on any criminal charges.

"We don't see too many cases with a child this young operating any type of equipment," said Shaynee Fanara, chief assistant prosecutor.

Officials will review what knowledge the parents had of the child's use of the ATV and what the supervision level of the toddler was at the time, she said.

The incident remains under investigation.

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Protect children, and parents Rewrite state rules for removing children from their parents

BY DONALD N. DUQUETTE • MAY 7, 2008

Michigan's child protection system should not only protect our children, it should also protect our liberty. And the story of 7-year-old Leo Ratte, who was placed in foster care for two nights after a Tigers game because his father didn't know Mike's Hard Lemonade contains alcohol, should give us all pause.

This could happen to any one of us.

I know how hard it is to be a child protective services worker; I used to be one myself. Life, death or serious injury to a child can hang on CPS decisions. But the seriousness of their work and their good intentions do not excuse them from the duty to be careful, thoughtful and professional.

A child should not be removed from a parent unless it is absolutely necessary to do so to protect that child. As Leo's case points out, the standards in Michigan are too relaxed and the system is too bureaucratic and too discretionary.

We can do something about this without exposing other children to harm. Our Legislature and the governor can change laws governing emergency removal in cases of suspected child abuse or neglect.

Currently, the police may take a child into custody when the "surroundings are such as to endanger his health, morals or welfare." The court, pending a hearing, may continue to keep that child in custody if "home conditions make immediate removal necessary."

No state has a more relaxed standard than Michigan's, and federal courts have held that the Constitution requires a stricter standard of "imminent danger" before a child may be removed on an emergency basis.

Michigan lawmakers can fix this discrepancy. They also could clarify requirements for keeping a child in custody after the first hearing.

Currently, at the very first hearing, a court can keep a child away from the parents if "it is contrary to the welfare of the child to remain at home." This is another very loose standard. Some state courts have interpreted this language as requiring judges to balance the harm that a removal would cause against the imminent risk to a child of remaining in the parent's care.

For example, New York's highest court said "a blanket presumption favoring removal was never intended. The court must do more than identify the existence of a risk of serious harm. ... It must balance that risk against the harm removal might bring, and it must determine factually which course is in the child's best interests."

Before 1997, Michigan law required a three-part test for removal: substantial risk of harm with the parent, risk of harm from removal, and whether the child could be made safe within the home without removal. We should return to this more rigorous and child-sensitive standard.

A more careful decision-making process could actually enhance the result for children and their parents, because the assessment would be more deliberate and thoughtful. The caseworkers, and ultimately the court, would be required to analyze the case from all perspectives considering not only the risk to the child but also ways in which the child could be immediately made safe without removal from his parents or family. These decisions should never be by rote or ritual, as was done in Leo's case.

Our child protection system also needs more and better training of caseworkers and judges hearing these cases. Parents and children require assertive and competent lawyers to represent their interests. Unfortunately, far too often these cases are simply processed, rather than thoughtfully reviewed and deliberated.

We can and should do a better job balancing the interests of protection and liberty. In 1928, Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis made an observation that remains as relevant today as it was then.

"Experience should teach us to be most on our guard to protect liberty when the government's purposes are beneficent," he wrote. "Men born to freedom are naturally alert to repel invasion of their liberty by evil-minded rulers. The greatest dangers to liberty lurk in insidious encroachment by men of zeal, well-meaning but without understanding."

DONALD N. DUQUETTE is a clinical professor of law and director of the Child Advocacy Law Clinic at the University of Michigan Law School. Write to him in care of the Free Press Editorial Page, 615 W. Lafayette, Detroit, MI 48226 or at *oped@freepress.com*.

Liquor industry shares blame

MAY 7, 2008

As a grandparent who is intimately aware of the challenges of raising mentally, emotionally and physically healthy children, I deplore the proliferation of alcoholic beverages masked to appear to be nothing but innocuous soda pop or energy drinks.

There are many times when parents are at fault for not supervising their children closely enough. However, that does not appear to have been the case in the incident that occurred at a Tigers game last month.

This parent should not be blamed for his honest though frightening mistake. It is the marketing tactics by these firms and weak labeling requirements that foster these types of errors.

Corene Munro

Waterford

Intentional deception

The name of the product -- Mike's Hard Lemonade -- is deceiving to many people. As the grandmother of three pre-teen children and a recovery coach for substance abusers, I am greatly concerned. Our children are innocently being taken victims of the liquor industry, and action has to start now.

Yes, parents need to take responsibility, and they need to educate their children, but so many are not aware of the evils that lurk in these types of drinks. The advertisers are also responsible for making these products so appealing to the underage.

These types of products can eventually lead to the hard drug culture that is slowly eating away America. Please do something before we lose our most valuable commodity: our kids.

Joelene Beckett

St. Clair Shores

Demand better labeling

As the executive director of the Tri-Community Coalition of Berkley, Huntington Woods and Oak Park, I am actually not too surprised that this otherwise responsible dad was easily confused about the spiked lemonade. Alcopops like this are deliberately designed and marketed to appeal to youths and fool their parents.

Our coalition has been aware of this problem and has worked with the members of our umbrella organization, the Alliance of Coalitions for Healthy Communities, to bring more media attention to it. We cannot blame this father for thinking that lemonade is actually lemonade, which would be appropriate for a child to drink; instead, we need to crack down on where and how alcopops are sold and demand stronger alcohol labeling requirements.

Judy Rubin

Huntington Woods

Parents' responsibility

Am I the only person who blames Christopher Ratte for the mess caused by his neglect? Who gives their child anything without reading the label? That goes for food, drinks, toys, video games and everything else. This is especially true if it is something you never heard of.

If Ratte had done his job as a parent, Child Protective Services would not have been involved.

If I had to choose between CPS doing too much or not doing enough, I'll take doing too much.

Jacquelyn Davis

Detroit

Overpriced, overreacted

The real crime isn't the mistake Chris Ratte made by buying his son what he thought was a simple lemonade, it's the \$7 the concession stand charged for the drink.

Then to be put through the horror of having his son taken away by CPS, even after he was cleared by a doctor, is another example of an authority going too far.

Nancy Allen

Westland

Spiked lemonade?

It may surprise the police, child protective workers and employees of Comerica Park, but I never heard of alcohol in lemonade. What else has been spiked?

I can't understand why the authorities spent all the time and inflicted all the grief and produced all the costs because a father at the ballpark didn't expect lemonade to be spiked with alcohol.

An apology should be made, and the Tigers organization should do something about this. Some of the people involved need a big dose of common sense, better training and better judgment.

Mary Lee Blackmon

Saline

Believable excuse

I don't know whether Child Protective Services is trying to establish some sort of credibility after a long series of failures to protect children from abusive parents or whether Professor Ratte was simply not believed when he claimed he did not realize that Mike's Hard Lemonade was alcoholic. I mean, anyone who hasn't been living on the moon for the last 20 years -- I find his claim thoroughly believable.

Academics are extraordinarily out of touch with popular culture. It's only in the last year that I learned that Paris Hilton is not a European hotel.

Harry Frank

Professor Emeritus

The University of Michigan-Flint



Bills seek to help Michigan foster care system

5/6/2008, 7:17 p.m. ET

By **TIM MARTIN**
The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Michigan's strained foster care system might get some support from the private sector under a plan soon to be introduced in the state Legislature.

The bills outlined Tuesday by two Republican lawmakers would create a state foster care advisory board to propose improvements and help educate people about how they can help support the system. The panel also would help foster children who are getting older and soon will be on their own without family support to transition out of the system.

The plan would create a trust fund that would be supported by charitable donations, including a checkoff option on state income tax forms.

Department of Human Services spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet said Tuesday that lawmakers shared the concept with department representatives last week and they are willing to look at the proposal.

Last month, the Department of Human Services announced task force of more than 60 members aimed at improving Michigan child welfare systems including protective services, adoption, juvenile justice and foster care. The plan discussed Tuesday is more narrowly tailored to foster care.

"A goal is to educate the public on the various ways to serve in foster care," said Rep. Craig DeRoche of Novi, the House's highest-ranking Republican and a supporter of the upcoming legislation. "These proposals are simply a way to get more external support for the system."

The state has 6,611 licensed foster homes. Agencies are looking to recruit more foster parents. But there are other ways for the public to help the foster care system, lawmakers said. The advisory panel — whose members would include leaders of various state departments and the chief justice of the Michigan Supreme Court — would help identify and promote those options.

The state typically has had between 18,000 and 19,000 children in the foster care system at any one time in the past decade.

Several efforts have been made over the years to try and help the state's foster care system. Republicans who are introducing the latest proposals say the measures aren't political, and they commended efforts already under way to improve the system from the administration of Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm. A Democratic lawmaker, Rep. Dudley Spade of Tipton, will sponsor one of the upcoming bills.

Lawmakers said the foster care issue has become so overwhelming that the private sector must be tapped to help.

"Many have wisdom and insight on how to improve the system," said Sen. Bill Hardiman, R-Kentwood, vice chairman of the Senate Families and Human Services Committee. "Working together, we will be able to do that."

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May 6, 2008

DEROCHE, HARDIMAN ANNOUNCE FOSTER CARE BOARD, TRUST FUND

In keeping with a recent string of public initiatives meant to address the state's troubled foster care system, legislation announced on Tuesday takes another shot at healing the overwhelmed system, this time in the form of a state foster care advisory board and foster care trust fund.

House [Minority Leader Craig DeRoche](#) (R-Novi) and [Sen. Bill Hardiman](#) (R-Kentwood), chair of the Senate Appropriations Human Services Subcommittee, said that both chambers expect to introduce bills as soon as this week that would create the board and the fund, both of which are aimed at reducing caseloads, instances of abuse and neglect and helping older foster children transition into adulthood after their foster care eligibility is terminated.

Mr. Hardiman praised the "great new administration" at the Department of Human Services for their efforts at fixing what ails foster care.

However, he said, "(the board) helps garner more support from the private sector."

Among the efforts of the administration, led by new Director Ismael Ahmed, is the Michigan Child Welfare Improvement Task Force, a 70-member group made up community agencies, families, policymakers and department members unveiled by the department two weeks ago as its way to study best practices for foster care.

Ron Hicks, legislative liaison for DHS, said that this new board suggested by Mr. DeRoche and Mr. Hardiman is separate from that initiative. He said legislators have assured him that they didn't intend to compete with DHS taskforce efforts.

Rather, said Mr. DeRoche, this legislation is a way to immediately address the problems that exist in foster care, modeled after the Child Abuse and Neglect Board and Children's Trust Fund started nearly two decades ago, both of which "do very well," he said.

The DHS director, as well as the director of the Department of Community Health, the state superintendent of public instruction, the Michigan Children's Institute superintendent and the chief justice of the Supreme

Court, as well as members of the public appointed by the governor would sit on the board.

The foster care trust fund would be funded through income tax checkoff and charitable donations. The advisory board would decide what parts of the foster care system would then receive the money.

Michigan Report

May 6, 2008

D.H.S. AUDIT: CLIENTS, PROVIDERS NOT FOLLOWING DOCUMENTATION RULES

Of the 2,000 daycare providers audited who received reimbursement from the Department of Human Services only 338 kept the attendance records required of them, according to an internal audit performed last year by DHS. DHS conducted the audit from March to December of 2007 and decided to continue its random checks after discovering that 489, or 24 percent, of providers only provided partial documentation and nearly 15 percent of providers said they didn't even keep attendance records.

Even worse, 844 caregivers, or 41 percent, didn't bother to respond to the department's request for documentation.

As for the clients, 8,568 out of 36,793 had no reported earnings to the state Unemployment Insurance Agency even though they stated that they needed DHS to pick up the tab for daycare because they were at work.

Nearly half, 47 percent, of clients didn't respond to requests for information to follow up on employment verification.

Nearly 17 percent provided verifications that were "insufficient" to verify employment and the remaining 36.6 percent of clients were found to be in compliance with the program during the follow up.

In order to cut down on fraud and error in payments, the department takes a provider who doesn't respond to requests for verifications off its list of eligible providers, the report said.

A total of 840 providers were dis-enrolled for failing to respond to DHS as a result of this audit. Of those, 86 percent didn't reenroll as providers.

Other ways in which the department hopes to improve the integrity of its payments are to increase the use of cross referencing systems such as the reverse wage match, sending alerts when a person uses a lot of daycare hours but makes little money from employment according to the Unemployment Insurance Agency.

The department will also impose penalties on clients and providers for misusing funds and have uniform sanctions for the first time, hopefully in place by the end of this year, said Lisa Brewer-Walraven, director for the Office for Early Childhood Programs at DHS.

May 6, 2008

EARLY OUT DISCUSSED FOR SOME MAXEY EMPLOYEES

Early retirement and supplemental pensions would be an option for some workers in the Department of Human Service's Bureau of Juvenile Justice under legislation considered by the House Labor Committee on Tuesday. The legislation is intended to offset a budget decision made in the current fiscal year that resulted in the closure 80 medium security beds and 131 workers laid off at the W.J. Maxey Boys Training School. Money from those savings was then spent on adding 150 field staff positions within DHS, as well as adding 138 foster care and 138 child welfare positions.

[HB 5944](#) and [HB 5966](#) would apply to bureau employees laid off or displaced on or after October 1, 2007 and on or before September 30, 2008. Displaced workers would be considered those active employees who have to move from their assignment location due to layoffs, workforce reductions or facility closures.

Those people would be offered two options for early out: if the person's age and service years are equal to or more than 70 years they could receive a retirement based on number of years worked multiplied by 1.5 percent of their average salary or if a person's age and service years are equal to or more than 75 years they could receive a retirement allowance based on a multiplier of 1.75 percent.

The legislation also would designate bureau employees after October 1, 2007 as "covered positions" under the State Employees Retirement Act. Currently, that designation is given to Department of Corrections employees. The bill would then make bureau employees with the last three years of their position designated as "covered" eligible for supplemental pension at age 51 if they had 25 years of service, or at age 56 if they had worked for 10 years. An official with the local AFSCME said the bills could affect approximately 50 employees at Maxey.

The bill sponsors, [Rep. Shanelle Jackson](#) (D-Detroit) and [Rep. Paul Opsommer](#) (R-DeWitt), said the legislation is intended to help those who have "served the state diligently," who have been affected by the budget cut, and who because of the physical nature of the job need to have the same benefits as those state employees who work with prisoners.

The AFL-CIO, Michigan Association of Government Employees, AFSCME and Michigan State Employees Association support the legislation.

Nick Ciarimitaro, legislation and public policy director for AFSCME Council 25, said his group has opposed other early out proposals for state employees because of the strain created on the remaining workforce, but in the Maxey case, the workforce reduction already has been mandated. He said many employees with 20 or more years of service are being lost or have to go through significant retraining because of the budgetary decision (which the group had opposed).

Mr. Ciarimitaro added that while many jobs do produce stress, the bureau jobs are much more difficult because the facility is housing more violent offenders.

But [Rep. Lorence Wenke](#) (R-Richland) repeatedly challenged proponents of the bills that most private sector employees who lose their jobs aren't offered these types of benefits and the cost for doing so would be paid for by business and individual taxpayers.

Mr. Opsommer countered that as companies in the private sector have downsized, they have offered buyouts, particularly for Michigan's own Big Three automakers.

"Is everybody (getting buyouts)? No. Can we make it better for everybody? No. I wish we could," he said.

And Todd Tennis, representing the Michigan State Employees Association, said lawmakers shouldn't argue for the reduction in worker benefits simply because workers in other sectors aren't receiving them.

"Let's save the ones we can," Ms. Jackson said.

Mr. Tennis added that the legislation boils down to allowing some workers to retire before 80 years of age and years of service without penalty. He said that will get older workers off the rolls and bring in new people who will be paid less and will be under the defined contribution retirement plan, not the pension system.

[Rep. Rick Jones](#) (R-Grand Ledge) said he supports the legislation, but wished bills providing an early out program for all state employees would be acted on as well.

The committee did not take a vote on the bills as HB 5966 actually needs to be formally re-referred from the House Retiree Health Care Reforms Committee. The panel is expected to take further testimony next week.



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Former Troy mayor faces domestic assault charge

By Michael P. McConnell
Daily Tribune Staff Writer

TROY -- Former Troy Mayor Matt Pryor is free on personal bond following his arraignment Monday in Troy District Court on a charge of domestic violence.

Pryor, 47, was arrested Sunday at the home he shares with his wife on Dequindre Road, police said.

"The wife called 911 about 2 p.m. Sunday," said Troy Police Lt. Gerry Scherlinck. "He left the house and then also called us basically reporting a domestic violence situation."

There were conflicting accounts from Pryor and his wife about what happened, police said.

"In short, there are claims of mutual assault," Scherlinck said.

Pryor called police again shortly before 4 p.m. after he returned to his house, police said.

"He indicated he was back at the house and we returned to continue our investigation," Scherlinck said.

After completing their investigation and taking statements, police arrested Pryor and he was jailed.

"Our investigation indicated he was probably the initial aggressor in the matter," Scherlinck said.

Pryor was first elected to the Troy City Council in 1993 and served as Troy's mayor from 2001-2004. He was defeated in his mayoral reelection bid by current Mayor Louise Schilling.

Pryor was jailed overnight and arraigned Monday before Troy District Magistrate Clement Waldman.

Pryor stood mute to the charge and requested a court-appointed attorney.

Waldman released Pryor on personal bond and ordered him not to have any contact with his wife.

Domestic violence is a misdemeanor, punishable by up to 93 days in jail and a \$500 fine.

Pryor is scheduled for a pre-trial hearing at 1:30 p.m. June 12 before Troy District Judge Michael Martone.

Contact Michael P. McConnell at mike.mcconnell@dailytribune.com or at (248) 591-2571.

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http://www.dailytribune.com/stories/050708/loc_localn04.shtml



May 7, 2008

Sister: Fisher feared son would be taken

Trace Christenson
The Enquirer

Michael Fisher told his sister just before Christmas in 2006 his marriage was in trouble but the problem would be solved soon.

"He said it would be over in a couple of days," Ranetta Fisher of Columbus, Ohio, testified Tuesday. "He didn't explain it and I didn't pay much attention to it."

But on the evening of Dec. 28, 2006, Ranetta Fisher had another conversation with her brother.

"He was acting like a 2-year-old kid," she told Assistant Prosecutor Michael Jaconette. "His voice was like a person who is just beginning to learn to function by talking."

"He said he didn't mean to do it, he didn't mean to kill them," she said.

It was then that Michael Fisher told his sister he had killed his wife, Candy, 38, and their son, Michael, 12.

Both were later found shot to death on the floor of the Fisher home on Territorial Road in Battle Creek.

"He said he shot her because she was going to take Michael away from him. He said it was an accident and he didn't mean to shoot them. He said it so many times that he didn't mean to do it."

Ranetta Fisher was one of the first witnesses to testify for the prosecution in the murder case against Michael Fisher, 43, charged with two counts of open murder in the Dec. 28, 2006, death of his wife and son.

Testimony continues today before Calhoun County Circuit Judge Allen Garbrecht, who will decide the case because the defense waived a jury trial.

Defense attorneys Justin McCarthy and Leslie Kranenberg have filed an intent to use insanity as a defense and they questioned several witnesses about Fisher's behavior shortly before and after his wife and son were killed.

Several witnesses told Garbrecht Candy and Michael Fisher had a strained relationship for years before she died.

"They didn't talk to each other unless they really needed to," Candy Fisher's daughter, Nicole Burgdorf, 22, told Assistant Prosecutor Sarah Lincoln. "To look at a married couple, they were not happy."

Candy Fisher's sister, Tamara Metzger, said Candy Fisher often talked about separating from her husband, including during a conversation they had at 1:05 p.m. on the afternoon of the killing.

"She was really angry and she said she was leaving, that she had enough," Metzger said. "And she always told me she would take her son with her if she left."

A few days before Christmas, Michael Fisher told Candy Fisher's brother, William Harrison, he expected to divorce his wife.

Witnesses also told Garbrecht that Michael Fisher had sometimes told them he could commit a crime and then use insanity as a defense.

A few days before the killing, Michael Fisher was watching television when he said, "You know you can kill your wife and child and plead insanity to get away with it," Harrison testified.

And Burgdorf said her stepfather sometimes talked about robbing a bank or committing another crime and "he said he would play the insanity role."

Burgdorf said she sometimes heard arguments between her mother and stepfather and frequently "he would tell her, 'You will never take my son away from me. You will never take Michael.'"

Late in the day on Dec. 28, Michael Fisher drove to the Kalamazoo Psychiatric Hospital and asked to be admitted.

He was distraught, crying and unable to converse, admitting clerk, Michelle Keiser, said .

"He was very upset about something and said he wanted to go to sleep and not wake up. He said he had done something unforgivable. He said he was beyond redemption and 'Even God can't help me now.'"

Fisher was taken to Borgess Medical Center, where he was arrested after police found the bodies of his wife and son.

Officer Kevin Stansbery was one of the officers who went to the hospital to return Fisher to Battle Creek.

"He asked me if I had ever shot anyone," Stansbery said, "and he asked me how long I had been an officer."

"Then he asked me if I would shoot him."

Trace Christenson can be reached at 966-0685 or tchrist@battlecr.gannett.com.

Scam? targets older Americans

Tuesday, May 06, 2008 - by Terry Mahr, Brooklyn Exponent Staff Writer

A letter offering to add a person's name to a list that will be sent to the Social Security Administration for a settlement for older Americans who are in what is referred to as the "notch generation" is being sent to older area residents.

An 84 year old Vineyard Lake woman who received the letter says she was asked to send \$19.99 to cover the costs of her registration on the list.

After she had mailed the money, she realized that the Social Security Administration already had all of her information. She says a daughter confirmed that she had "been taken" by the company.

Some retirees born from 1916 through 1926 call themselves "notch babies" because they believe they are receiving lower Social Security benefits than those born before or after them.

The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) researched the issue and says that retirees born in the years 1912 through 1916 received an unintended increase in benefits from an amendment to the Social Security program in 1972.

An amendment in 1977 corrected that accounting error and, according to AARP, since that time the only differences that arise in payments are from the overall level of a worker's earnings.

AARP urges caution in donating to organizations that claim they are "working" on the notch issue.

The Brooklyn Exponent
<http://www.theexponent.com/>

Race gap in infant deaths has widened in Detroit

Report finds risks higher for black babies

BY ZLATI MEYER • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • MAY 7, 2008

Despite Michigan's success at decreasing more than half the infant-mortality risk factors, African-American infants in the state are three times more likely than white babies to die during their first year of life, according to a study released Tuesday.

Kids Count in Michigan, which studied the 10 counties where more than 90% of the black babies in the state are born, found the mortality rate gap between white and African-American children widened in Detroit from 2004 to 2006 and Macomb and decreased in Oakland County and out-Wayne, which is Wayne County minus Detroit.

The number of black infants who died jumped from 16.7 per 1,000 live births in 1998-2000 to 16.9 in 2004-06 in Detroit. The city's overall infant mortality rate was almost triple that of the rest of southeast Michigan, the research by the Lansing-based nonprofit determined.

Out-Wayne County also saw an increase in the number of white babies who died within 12 months -- 3.6 per 1,000 live births in 1998-2000 to 5.1 in 2004-06 -- as did Oakland County -- 4.2 to 4.9.

"We need to target infant mortality as a major issue in the state," said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, a researcher at the Michigan League for Human Services, which produces the Kids Count report. "We have a three-times-higher rate in one community. That's totally unacceptable in a country that prides itself on equal opportunity and equal access to resources.

"We need to assure that all children wherever or whatever community they're born into have an equal chance to be born healthy."

The study looked at eight factors related to higher infant mortality -- teen mothers; repeat births to teen mothers; unwed mothers; mothers without high-school diplomas; mothers who got late or no prenatal care; mothers who smoked during pregnancy; babies born weighing fewer than 5.5 pounds, and preterm births. The only two risk factors that went up statewide were births to unmarried mothers and births of low weight; the latter is the key threat, experts say.

Many of those factors hit poorer, African-American communities harder, said Dr. Richard Smith of the Henry Ford Adolescent Pregnancy Clinic in Detroit.

"The race disparity has nothing to do with skin color," he explained. "It has to do with social structures in many of our communities. In African-American communities that are poor, there is poor access to prenatal care. Look in the Detroit area still in terms of private OB/GYNs practicing or physicians not aligned with hospital systems.

"I see teen mothers in the teen pregnancy clinic, and we provide every effort to get kids in as early as possible," Smith said.

Kids Count in Michigan is part of a broad national effort to measure the well-being of children at the state and local levels.

To see the full infant mortality report go to <http://www.milhs.org/>.

Contact **ZLATI MEYER** at 313-223-4439 or meyer@freepress.com.



May 7, 2008

Ingham's black babies at risk

Mortality rate highest in state, but report finds statewide drop

Kathleen Lavey
Lansing State Journal

Black babies born in Ingham County are more likely to die during their first year of life than babies born anywhere else in Michigan, a new report says.

But no one is sure exactly why the rate in Ingham County is so high - or why black babies statewide are three times more likely to die than their Caucasian counterparts.

"I don't know the secret answer, and I'd be very willing to listen to a recommendation on what that is," said Dr. Dean Sienko, medical director for the Ingham County Health Department.

Michigan needs to work on lowering infant mortality in general and on closing the race gap, said Dr. Greg Holzman, chief medical executive for the state Department of Community Health.

"These numbers are disgraceful," he said. "These are human lives that we're talking about."

An average 20.1 of each 1,000 black babies born in Ingham County died in the year 2004 to 2006, according to the report produced by Kids Count in Michigan.

By contrast, 4.7 of each 1,000 white babies died in the years 2004 to 2006.

Of the 10 urban areas where most black babies are born in Michigan, Washtenaw County had the lowest death rate for them - 12.2 per 1,000.

"This is not a new problem," said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, director of Kids Count in Michigan, which produced the report. "What this report shows is that it's not getting any better.

There was some good news. Overall in Michigan, the mortality rate for babies up to 1-year-old dropped from 8.1 deaths per 1,000 births in 1998-2000 to 7.6 deaths per 1,000 births in the years 2004-2006.

And some factors that influence infants' health improved.

For example, there was a statewide drop of 14 percent in the rate of women who smoked during pregnancy and the rate of teen pregnancy dropped by 13 percent.

Low birth weight and prematurity are key factors in infant death, especially within the first 28 days of life, Holzman said. Birth defects are a third factor. After the first month, risks include dangerous sleep habits and injury, he said.

But that's not all.

"There are other factors going on that I don't think we completely understand," Holzman said. For example, he pointed to recent research that takes in factors such as economic status and education into account when calculating infant mortality rates.

Even when poverty is not an issue, black babies have higher mortality rates.

"We need to look very closely at the programs that we're using and see if we're making a difference," Holzman said.

"If we're not making a difference, we need to move on to something else."

Sienko said the high mortality rate and the disparity are strong concerns.

Sienko said the county has programs in place, including a women's health clinic that includes medical staffers, nutritionists and social workers to help address the issues.

"Clearly, tobacco use is associated with low birth weight," he said. "We also talk about pre-conception care. We want women to be healthy before they get pregnant, with good health habits, a good diet, exercise."

Promoting safe sleep habits also is important.

"As the county's medical examiner, I have listened all too often to stories of infant deaths because the infant was not placed in a safe sleeping environment," Sienko said. "I think we have some real opportunities there."

In tight budget times, Zehnder-Merrell said it's important to keep programs for mothers and babies going.

"Communities like Boston, who have managed to make some inroads in their infant mortality, have stated in no uncertain terms that it isn't something that's going to turn around in a couple of years," she said. "You have to make a long-term commitment to it and put your priorities and your resources there."

Contact Kathleen Lavey at 377-1251 or klavey@lsj.com.

Niles Daily Star

ONLINE EDITION

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Niles postal carriers ready to accept food donations

By ZURI KELVER and MARCIA STEFFENS / Niles Daily Star
Tuesday, May 6, 2008 11:09 AM EDT

NILES - As the price of food reaches historic highs a special group of philanthropists are doing their part to help those most in need. On Saturday, May 10 letter carriers nationwide will conduct the 16th annual Letter Carriers Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive.

"It's a wonderful, wonderful day, important to all the letter carriers. It is almost like Christmas," said Chris Cloud, a walking carrier in the City of Niles for 29 years this May 26.

"I look forward to this day. People come running after us, if they didn't get their food out in time," she said. Kids bring out bags of food and she even had a person in a wheelchair come out to her.

"We don't mind at all to do such a great thing. It is the best work day with all the volunteers and their families participating," she added.

Some relatives and friends follow the carriers on the route, like her daughter and friend pulling a wagon behind her, or others drive in a van or car to help bring the donated food back to the post office. Other volunteers unload, separate and weigh the food on the dock.

"There are lots and lots of people working on it, she said.

"It is so important, there are more hungry people this year," she added. She hopes this drive will help stockpile the food pantries, especially with the school lunch program ending with the school year.

The charitable event is a concerted effort by the AFL-CIO, The United Way of America, America's Second Harvest, Campbell's Soup and the U.S. Postal Service.

Last year over 70 million pounds of food and other items were donated nationwide. Of that total 55,884 pounds was procured locally by branch 775 of the National Association of Letter Carriers here in Niles.

The postal customers of Niles, Buchanan, Berrien Springs, Dowagiac, New Buffalo, Three Oaks, Galien and Edwardsburg can leave any non-perishable food item, soap or paper goods by their mailbox.

The Postal Service will do the rest and deliver all donated items to a local food bank. While there is no restriction on the amount any one household can donate the Postal Service does ask that all donations be boxed for easy transport and protected from the rain, if necessary.

Any questions should be directed to the Niles Post Office at 683-5520.

R & B Car Company is joining the drive by offering customers a chance to stock their garage with a new car, while helping stock the local food pantries.

The automobile dealer will give \$100 towards the down payment of a car for every pound of non-perishable food the customer brings in, up to \$1,000. The deal is in effect from now until Saturday.

The business is located at 50537 SR 933 North, South Bend, Ind., just past the state line. They are open at 9 a.m. each day and will be open until 8 p.m. today and Thursday, 7 p.m. on Wednesday and Friday and until 6 p.m. on Saturday. Call (574) 247-9900 for more information.



The 16th annual Stamp Out Hunger food drive will be held this Saturday, May 10. Donations of non-perishable food will be picked up by local postal workers and delivered to area food pantries.



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Ogtsego County: Jobless rate inches downward as seasonal shift begins

Tuesday, May 6, 2008 11:08 PM EDT

LANSING — The jobless rate for Otsego County edged downward in March, but state employment officials are looking for increased employment over the next several months.

Like in Otsego County, the seasonally unadjusted unemployment rates edged downward over the month in 12 of Michigan's 17 major labor market areas, including the Northeast Michigan area, of which Otsego County is part, according to the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth ([DLEG](#)).

Otsego County's unemployment rate dropped to 10.4 percent in March, compared with 11 percent in February. Montmorency County saw its rate drop one-tenth of a percentage point to 16 percent in March, from 16.1 percent in February.

The unemployment rate for the Northeast region slipped to 12.3 percent in March from 13 percent in February.

"What we saw was a little decline, which is fairly typical in what we see from February to March," Jim Rhein, DLEG economic analyst said. "The March rates declined somewhat, but the rates are still very high and seasonal. Nothing really changed during the winter. There were not large increases in employment."

In March, total state employment and labor force levels increased slightly in the majority of regions even as the state's unemployment rate increased two-tenths of a percent from 7.7 in February to 7.9 in March.

The national jobless rate for April was at 5.0 percent, down a tenth of a percent from March's 5.1 rate. Rhein said that the loss of 20,000 jobs nationally in April was down from what was expected, but still represented four months of consecutive employment decline.

As for Northern Michigan, the coming months should see an increase in seasonal employment, Rhein indicated.

"What we should see in the next several months is historically large employment increases in Northern Michigan," he said.

From February to March, jobless rate reductions in 12 regions ranged from 0.1 to 0.7 of a percentage point with an average decrease of 0.4 of a percentage point. The unemployment rate in the Ann Arbor Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) was unchanged in March.

Unemployment rates rose over the month in four areas, including the Flint, Detroit-Warren-Livonia, Saginaw-Saginaw Township North, and Bay City MSAs. These four regions were all impacted by strike-related layoffs in the auto industry.

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May 2008

After 40 Years in Michigan's DHS, Jim Nye Retires; Elevated Youth Voices



Jim Nye

After nearly 40 years at Michigan's Department of Human Services, Jim Nye is retiring. He has spent the past 11 years as director of field operations where he has worked closely with the Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative (MYOI), building a relationship between the state agency and the nonprofit. In his DHS post, Nye made MYOI a top priority. "He saw the Jim Casey work as an important initiative because he sees the benefits of supporting youth whom we take into our care," said Susan Kelly, senior director of strategic consulting at Casey Family Programs.

Over the years, Nye saw many changes in Michigan's child welfare system, but one that stands out most is the department becoming more involved in working with youth aging out of foster care. "It makes no sense to think that at 18 something is going to snap and everything is okay and that a kid has all the resources he needs," said Nye. "That doesn't happen in any family situation, let alone foster care." Nye pushed for mentoring programs and was involved in setting up a state Medicaid plan that provides automatic coverage for youth aging out until they are 21. In Northern Michigan, educational planners also were established to help provide youth in foster care with opportunities. Nye also is proud of the creation of student

internships within the agency with youth making recommendations and advising on policy and youth transition issues. "Jim Nye is a quiet leader," said Dan Cowan, MYOI's family-to-family manager. "He is the one who recognized right away that youth had a voice."

In the past decade, Nye pushed to give youth the opportunity to speak in front of legislators because he believes their voices are most effective. Nye organized travel arrangements and helped the youth work on their presentations for the governor.

Nye said the best part of his job has been hearing that he made a significant difference in someone's life. But he's also made a profound difference in Michigan's child welfare system. "Jim has affected operations in the DHS like few other people have. He is a bridge-maker of transitions," said Kelly. In his retirement, Nye plans to continue to spend time with youth, particularly at his grandson's sporting events.

Joseph Khalil Kanazeh



Joseph Khalil Kanazeh
Lansing, MI

Joe was born February 9, 1942, in Akka, Palestine. He was raised in Beirut, Lebanon, and moved to the United States in 1970. He died May 2, 2008, after a brief illness, at the age of 66. He attended college in Florida and at Michigan State University and worked for the City of Lansing as an auditor for more than 20 years, retiring in 1993. He was working for the State of Michigan at the time of his death. Joe is survived by his loving wife of 36 years, Frossina, sons Nabil (Angela), Shafeek, daughter Mary (Rob) Russell and two granddaughters Samara and Rhiana Russell, all of Lansing, MI; brothers Issa (Diane), George (Siham), Souhail (Claudette), Mike, Samir (Selena), Anees, and sister Afaf; 23 nieces and nephews and the Kobty, Bayouk, Badin, Geadaa and Dallal families. He was preceded in death by his parents Khalil and Mary Kanazeh. Joe enjoyed walking and spending time with his family and friends. He loved to travel, especially to the beaches of Florida. He was a devoted husband, father, grandpa (jido), uncle, and friend; a man of integrity and compassion who will be sadly missed by all who knew him. The family sincerely appreciates the support and care they and Joe received from their friends and the staff of the WICU at Sparrow Regional Medical Center. The family will receive friends at St. Andrew Orthodox Church, 1216 Greencrest Ave., East Lansing Thursday from 5-8 p.m. and Friday from 1-3 p.m. and 5-8 p.m. with the Panikheda Service celebrated at 7:00 p.m. Services will be held on Saturday, May 10, at 11:00 a.m. at Trinity

United Methodist Church, 7533 W Saint Joseph Hwy., Lansing, with the Rev. Fr. Christopher Rozdilski of St. Andrew Orthodox Church, officiating with Fr. Lawrence George Gosselin and the Rev. Dr. William Beachy. Graveside services immediately following at Delta Center Cemetery. Memorial contributions may be made to ARDS Support Center, Inc., 7172 Regional Street #278, Dublin, CA 94568-2324 or St. Andrew Orthodox Church, 1216 Greencrest Ave., East Lansing, MI 48823. The family is being served by Gorsline-Runciman Funeral Homes, Lansing.
Published in the Lansing State Journal - May 7, 2008

Gay marriage ban affects partner benefits, court rules

Mich. Supreme Court says public employees can't share health care with same-sex partners

BY DAWSON BELL • FREE PRESS LANSING BUREAU • MAY 7, 2008

An amendment to the state constitution approved by voters in 2004 to define marriage as the union of one man and one woman also prohibits public employers from providing health care and other benefits to the same sex partners of employees, a divided Michigan Supreme Court ruled today.

The court majority found that language in the amendment prohibiting recognition of other unions “for any purpose” included the extension of benefits to gay and lesbian partners of public employees. Several Michigan universities, including U-M and MSU, along with various municipal and school employers had offered the benefits as a means of attracting workers.

In the wake of voter approval of the amendment and questions about its effect on benefits, several had moved to alternative benefit policies.

The decision upholds an opinion by Attorney General Mike Cox.

The court majority was formed by Chief Justice Clifford Taylor and Justices Stephen Markman, Maura Corrigan, Elizabeth Weaver and Robert Young Jr. Dissenting were Justices Michael Cavanagh and Marilyn Kelly.

Wednesday, May 7, 2008

Michigan Supreme Court says gay partners can't get health benefits

Charlie Cain / Detroit News Lansing Bureau

LANSING -- A divided Michigan Supreme Court ruled Wednesday that a 2004 voter-approved ban against gay marriage also blocks governments and state universities from offering health insurance to the partners of gay workers.

The 5-2 decision affirms a state Court of Appeals ruling.

In their opinion, the five majority justices ruled that "the marriage amendment...which states 'the union of one man and one woman in marriage shall be the only agreement recognized as a marriage of similar union for any purpose,' prohibits public employers from providing health-insurance benefits to their employees' qualified same-sex domestic partners." The 34-page opinion was authored by Justice Stephen Markman and signed by the court's other four Republicans as well.

As many as 20 public universities, community colleges, school districts and local governments in Michigan have benefits policies covering at least 375 gay couples. Some of the plans began as far back as the early 1990s.

The impact of the decision was not immediately clear, since many of the schools and governmental units adopted policies to try to comply with the ban after the Michigan Court of Appeals ruled in February of 2007 that the amendment covered them.

The new policies no longer specifically acknowledge domestic partnerships but make sure "other qualified adults," including gay partners, are eligible for medical and dental care. The adults have to live together for a certain amount of time, be unmarried, share finances and be unrelated.

Justice Marilyn Kelly dissented from the majority.

"First the language of the amendment itself prohibits nothing more than the recognition of same-sex marriages of similar unions. It is a perversion of the amendment's language to conclude that, by voluntarily offering the benefits at issue, a public employer recognizes a union similar to marriage," Kelly wrote in an opinion also signed by Justice Michael Cavanagh.

The Associated Press contributed to this report



May 7, 2008

Mich. high court: Law blocks health benefits for gay partners

Midday update

David Eggert
Associated Press

The Michigan Supreme Court ruled Wednesday that a 2004 ban against gay marriage also blocks governments and state universities from offering health insurance to the partners of gay workers.

The 5-2 decision affirms a state Court of Appeals ruling.

Up to 20 public universities, community colleges, school districts and local governments in Michigan have benefits policies covering at least 375 gay couples. Some of the plans began as far back as the early 1990s.

After the appeals court ruled in February 2007, universities and local governments rewrote their policies to try to comply with the gay marriage ban — so the effect of Wednesday's decision was unclear.

The new policies no longer specifically acknowledge domestic partnerships but make sure "other qualified adults," including gay partners, are eligible for medical and dental care. The adults have to live together for a certain amount of time, be unmarried, share finances and be unrelated.

The voter-approved law, which passed 59 percent to 41 percent, says the union between a man and woman is the only agreement recognized as a marriage "or similar union for any purpose."

Justice Stephen Markman, writing for the majority, said that while marriages and domestic partnerships aren't identical, they are similar. He was joined by Chief Justice Clifford Taylor and Justices Maura Corrigan, Elizabeth Weaver and Robert Young Jr.

Dissenting Justices Michael Cavanagh and Marilyn Kelly said the constitutional amendment prohibits nothing more than same-sex marriages or similar unions. They argued that circumstances surrounding the election suggest Michigan voters didn't intent to take away people's benefits.

Republican Attorney General Mike Cox in 2005 interpreted the measure to make unconstitutional existing domestic partner policies at the city of Kalamazoo and elsewhere.

Twenty-one gay couples sued, saying the amendment was about marriage and preserving the status quo — not taking away benefits from gays. Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm has sided with the couples.
